

Construction sites are busy places. Many contractors work side-by-side and heavy vehicles come and go. In this environment consultation, cooperation and coordination are essential to ensure the health and safety of everyone on site. They are also a requirement for businesses under the model WHS Act.

Construction work: a definition

Construction work is any work carried out in connection with the construction, alteration, conversion, fitting-out, commissioning, renovation, repair, maintenance, refurbishment, demolition, decommissioning or dismantling of a structure, or preparation of a building site. Under the model WHS Act, the term 'demolition' includes 'deconstruction'.

Work-related injuries

An industry profile we compiled in 2015 found the most common work-related injuries experienced by workers in the construction industry were:

- cuts and open wounds (31%)
- sprains and strains (21%)
- chronic joint or muscle conditions (16%).

These injuries were mainly due to:

- hitting or being hit by an object (31%)
- lifting, pushing or pulling objects (30%)
- falls from a height (15%).

Work-related fatalities

When it comes to work-related fatalities, the most recent statistics from the [Construction Industry Profile](#) show that between 2003–13, 401 workers died on construction sites in Australia. The majority of those (28% or 112 workers) involved falls from a height:

- 40 involved ladders, mobile ramps, stairways and scaffolding
- 32 involved a fall from a roof
- 17 involved buildings under construction or demolition.

Other fatalities during this period were made up of:

- vehicle collisions 16% (65)
- electrocution 15% (61)
- being hit by a moving object 12% (48)
- being hit by a falling object 11% (46)
- being trapped between or in equipment 8% (31)
- other causes 9% (38).

Work health and safety duties

At each step of the process in construction work, PCBUs are subject to certain general and specific duties under the model WHS laws. For example:

- The model WHS Regulations require the person that commissions construction work to consult with the designer of a structure about safety matters and to give the designer and the principal contractor for the project information about safety matters.
- A PCBU that carries out construction work must manage and control WHS risks associated with that work. It must also ensure that a construction site is secured from unauthorised access.
- The principal contractor for a construction project is also a PCBU and must be aware of the WHS duties that apply to all PCBUs that carry out construction work, as well as the specific duties that are imposed on principal contractors in that industry.
- Specific duties that apply to principal contractors include, but are not limited to, the duty to be clearly identified by signage posted at the construction site, the duty to prepare, review, keep and inform others about the WHS management plan for the construction project.
- Under the model WHS Act, the person with management or control of a workplace must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the workplace, the means of entering and exiting the workplace and anything arising from the workplace are without risk to the health and safety of any person.

The [model Code of Practice for Construction Work](#) provides practical guidance to achieve the standards of health, safety and welfare required under the model WHS Act and Regulations in relation to construction work.

High risk construction work

In the construction industry, a PCBU that carries out high risk construction has additional WHS duties. These include requirements to prepare, keep, comply with and review a safe work method statement for the work and provide the safe work method statement to the principal contractor.

High risk construction work:

- involves a risk of a person falling more than 2 m
- is carried out on a telecommunication tower
- involves demolition of an element of a structure that is load-bearing
- involves demolition of an element of a structure that is related to the physical integrity of the structure
- involves, or is likely to involve, disturbing asbestos
- involves structural alteration or repair that requires temporary support to prevent collapse
- is carried out in or near a confined space
- is carried out in or near a shaft or trench deeper than 1.5 m or a tunnel
- involves the use of explosives
- is carried out on or near pressurised gas mains or piping
- is carried out on or near chemical, fuel or refrigerant lines
- is carried out on or near energised electrical installations or services
- is carried out in an area that may have a contaminated or flammable atmosphere

- involves tilt-up or precast concrete
- is carried out on, in or adjacent to a road, railway, shipping lane or other traffic corridor in use by traffic other than pedestrians
- is carried out in an area of a workplace where there is any movement of powered mobile plant
- is carried out in areas with artificial extremes of temperature
- is carried out in or near water or other liquid that involves a risk of drowning
- involves diving work.

Requirements for carrying out construction work

To be able to carry out construction work, a person must complete an introductory safety training course called 'general construction induction training'. This is also commonly known as 'white card' training.

Under the model WHS Act, a PCBU must make sure every worker has completed white card training, including those who have completed training in the past but have not carried out construction work in the last two years. Once a person has completed that training they may apply to a WHS regulator for a white card.

A white card issued in one state or territory or by the Commonwealth is generally recognised Australia wide.

- For more information about white card training, cross-border recognition, applications and renewal of white cards, contact the WHS Regulator in your state or territory or the Commonwealth.

Some types of construction work—such as operating certain types of cranes or carrying out scaffolding work—require a [high-risk work licence](#).

Model codes of practice

The [model Code of Practice for Construction Work](#) should be read in conjunction with other codes on specific hazards and control measures relevant to the construction industry including:

- [Demolition Work](#)
- [Excavation Work](#)
- [Safe Design of Structures](#)
- [Managing the Risk of Falls at Workplaces](#)
- [Preventing Falls in Housing Construction](#)
- [Managing Electrical Risks at the Workplace](#)
- [Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work](#)
- [Confined Spaces](#)
- [Hazardous Manual Tasks](#)
- [How to Manage and Control Asbestos in the Workplace](#)
- [How to Safely Remove Asbestos.](#)